

Learning in Lego: Building the Public Infrastructure for Recognition We Forgot We Needed

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We live in a world where learning systems are often treated as institutions, credentials, or curriculum, but not as infrastructure. At the Council Advancing Work-Based Learning (CAWBL), we take a different view. We see recognition not as a tool or intervention, but as a public system. This invisible framework already exists in daily life and deserves to be made visible, usable, and trustworthy.

This session explored CAWBL's approach to building that system. Using the accessible metaphor of Lego, the audience was introduced to how we designed and now operate a modular, interoperable infrastructure for work-based learning recognition, positioning CAWBL not as a regulator but as a standards and indexing body—more akin to ISBN or DOI agencies than credentialing authorities.

The Story: Rediscovering What Was Always There

Most recognition systems are built on institutional definitions of legitimacy. CAWBL takes a different view: that *Work-Based Learning (WBL)* is not something institutions create, but something people already do. We define WBL as any purposeful activity that contributes to personal, organizational, or societal outcomes—whether that is a municipal employee coordinating an emergency shelter response, a worker-owned cooperative training new members in sustainable food distribution, or a Sector Council deploying a new occupational training standard.

While the recognition infrastructure remains mostly invisible, our work begins by making it visible through indexing, structuring, and connecting what learners, workers, and communities are already building.

The Why: Recognition as Public Infrastructure

This section introduced the rationale behind CAWBL's infrastructure, a shared, standards-governed layer that enables recognition to function as *public infrastructure*—modular, traceable, and interoperable across contexts and lifetimes.

CAWBL developed the Work-Based Learning Numbering System (WBLNS) as that layer. Each object—Training Item, Unit, Standard, or End-Point Assessment—is assigned a globally persistent identifier and governed through structured metadata, schema relationships, and publishing rules. These "bricks" live within PathLedger, a public-facing platform modelled after historical apprenticeship logbooks. Users can submit evidence,

track progress, or publish new standards. This infrastructure enables *lifelong learning* to become *lifelong recognition*—not episodic, but continuous; not symbolic, but actionable.

By decoupling recognition from institutional control, the system allows individuals and organizations to participate in open architectures of value, while preserving the structure and trust needed for adoption at scale.

The How: Modularity, Stewardship, and Trust

This section demonstrated how CAWBL's system works in practice. I walked through how a single indexed object—such as 10.1.0326532-ti00150—can be built, aligned to a competency framework, published in PathLedger, and then used by practitioners, employers, or assessors. Each object is part of a wider pathway and linked to the professional roles of Certified End-Point Assessment Assessors (C.EPAA) and Chartered WBL Designers (C.WBLD)—individuals trained to maintain the integrity and fidelity of recognition events.

Importantly, stewardship is distributed. CAWBL operates globally but adapts regionally through chartered Praxis Hubs. These hubs serve as implementation anchors for WBLNS-aligned training systems that reflect local needs and contexts. This modularity ensures the system scales without losing precision or credibility.

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